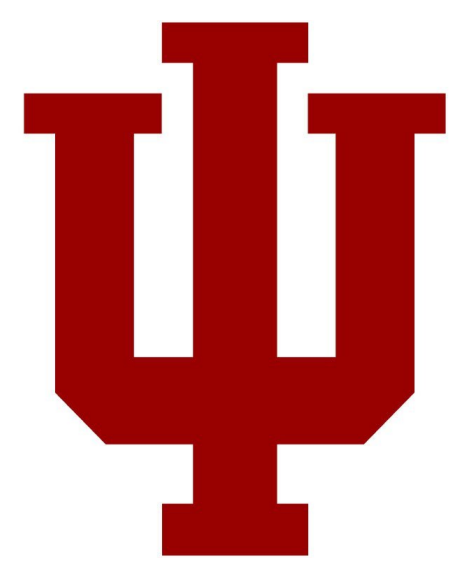


Developing a Social Media Strategy for a Small Non-Profit Organization: *More Conversation, Less Marketing*



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Abstract

Right Sharing of World Resources (RSWR), based in Richmond, Indiana, is a successful microfinance organization that empowers marginalized women in Kenya, India and Sierra Leone. Although established in 1967, RSWR remains a small organization compared with other NGOs and has not had the time or expertise to update its website or to take advantage of the power of social media for outreach and public relations. The first project was to complete a total redesign of RSWR's website as well as a new branding campaign. This project is to develop and implement a social media strategy that will enable RSWR to better communicate its message to its target audiences, such as donors, volunteers and the public at large. Building on the methodology used for the website redesign project, I interviewed key players and investigated social media best practices, specifically the social media approaches of small firms and non-profit organizations. Among my findings are that an organization should have a written policy and limit the number of people who can publish social media content. A social media strategy must be dynamic and there should be at least one person dedicated to content management. Content must be fresh, sincere and purposeful, never arbitrary or perfunctory and should be consistent with RSWR's overall branding efforts and public persona. This same methodology for developing a social media strategy could be used by nearly any small entity that has to be very judicious in how it communicates through 21st century technology.

Introduction

Microfinance, also known as microcredit, is a financial service that offers loans, savings and insurance to entrepreneurs and small business owners who don't have access to traditional sources of capital, like banks or investors. The goal of microfinancing is to provide individuals with money to invest in themselves or their business.

Microloans are typically lower than the average business loan (Business News Daily). Microfinance in developing countries is important because it helps individuals support themselves and gain financial security. It boosts the economy of communities and helps individuals to sustain their own finances. According to former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, microfinance in developing countries plays an important role in the eradication of poverty.

Right Sharing of World Resources is a Christian Quaker organization motivated by the calls to justice and right sharing. They partner with local organizations to provide grants to jump-start micro-enterprise ventures for female entrepreneurs in the developing countries of Sierra Leone, Kenya, and India. People in the developing world often have little or no access to capital. RSWR grants provide seed money which is recycled within a community. RSWR supplies each project with no more than \$5,500 per year, the idea being to provide enough capital to begin a small business. After receiving RSWR funds, organizations and communities are frequently able to obtain local funding. By giving small grants, RSWR is able to help women begin as many projects as possible with limited financial resources.

Like many small non-profits, Right Sharing of World Resources is a worthy and valuable organization with very limited resources. How can a small organization such as Right Sharing of World Resources effectively utilize the limited resources at its disposal to take advantage of social media and maximize the reach of their message.



This current project builds upon a previous project focused on the redesign of the Right Sharing of World Resources website. RSWR's website was thoroughly analyzed, then 70+ NGO websites were inspected to identify current trends in layout, design and navigation flow, including the websites of large, well-established international organizations such as Care and smaller organizations with more targeted missions. Best practices and usability principles such as a "call to action" to potential donors, volunteers and supporters were observed and cataloged with screenshots, which were grouped into a variety of collages for easy comparison. Ultimately, a new information architecture was developed and presented to Right Sharing of World Resources and after a board meeting, these changes were approved and recently went into effect.

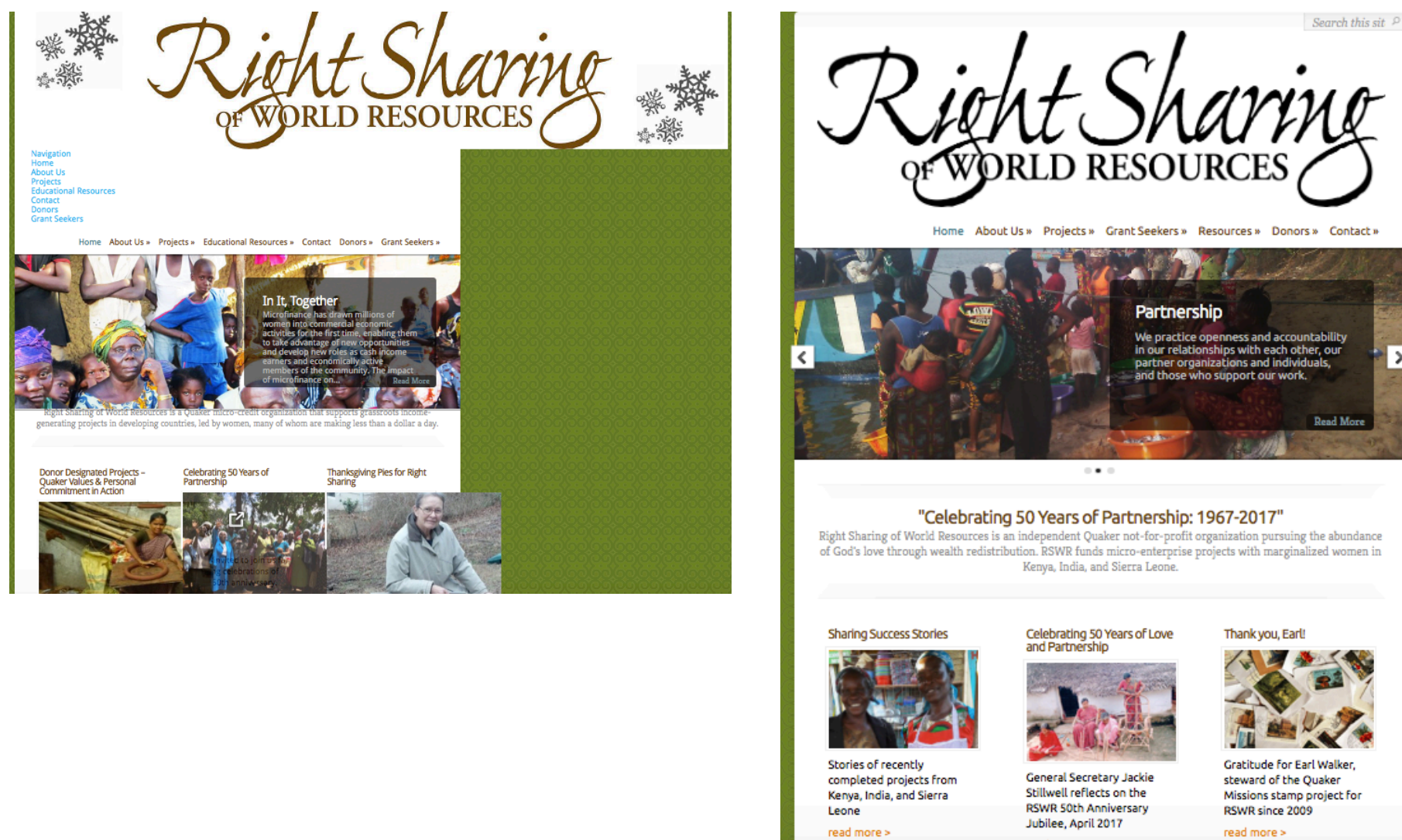
Material and Methods

Building on the methodology used for the website redesign project, I first began by familiarizing myself with the organization. I explored the Right Sharing of World Resources website and investigated their current internet presence. I then spoke to Right Sharing of World Resources employees to learn about their organization and their current social media strategy. This conversation served to find what the organization is hoping to achieve from its social media and to determine what personnel and time resources the staff at Right Sharing of World Resources believes that they can devote to social media activities. I also spoke with the graduate student who had redesigned the website and she familiarized me with her processes and experiences.

I identified comparable organizations whose social media presences could be studied and analyzed. Comparable organizations were broken into many categories: Quaker organizations, non-profit organizations with similar missions, very small organizations with under 10 employees. Special attention was paid to organization within the same Midwest geographical region as Right Sharing of World Resources.

I performed research investigating social media best practices for non-profits and small businesses. I read blogs and articles discussing this. I also conferred with to a social media expert from Carnegie Mellon to glean insights into social media best practices for small non-profit organizations.

Below is a before and after of the recent design changes to the RSWR website following the first part of this ongoing project.



Results

Brand Control

It is important to control your brand and have a consistent and uniform voice representing your organization. Organizations should have a written policy outlining how social media should be used and the number of people who can publish social media content should be limited.

Sincerity

Content must be fresh, sincere and purposeful, never arbitrary or perfunctory and should be consistent with RSWR's overall branding efforts and public persona.

Content Generation

A social media strategy must be dynamic and there should be at least one person dedicated to content management. RSWR should post more frequently. Currently their Facebook only shows two posts from 2017. Like many non-profits, RSWR likely has many stories that they can share which would make for engaging content.

(Photos provided by RSWR)



RSWR sponsored group Gimildi Friends from Kenya took on a poultry-raising project. One woman pictured, Befry Munai, began with 3 indigenous hens and a rooster. A microloan from RSWR enabled her to buy 6 more hens. Now Befry has over 80 hens. Selling some hens has allowed her to pay for her son's education

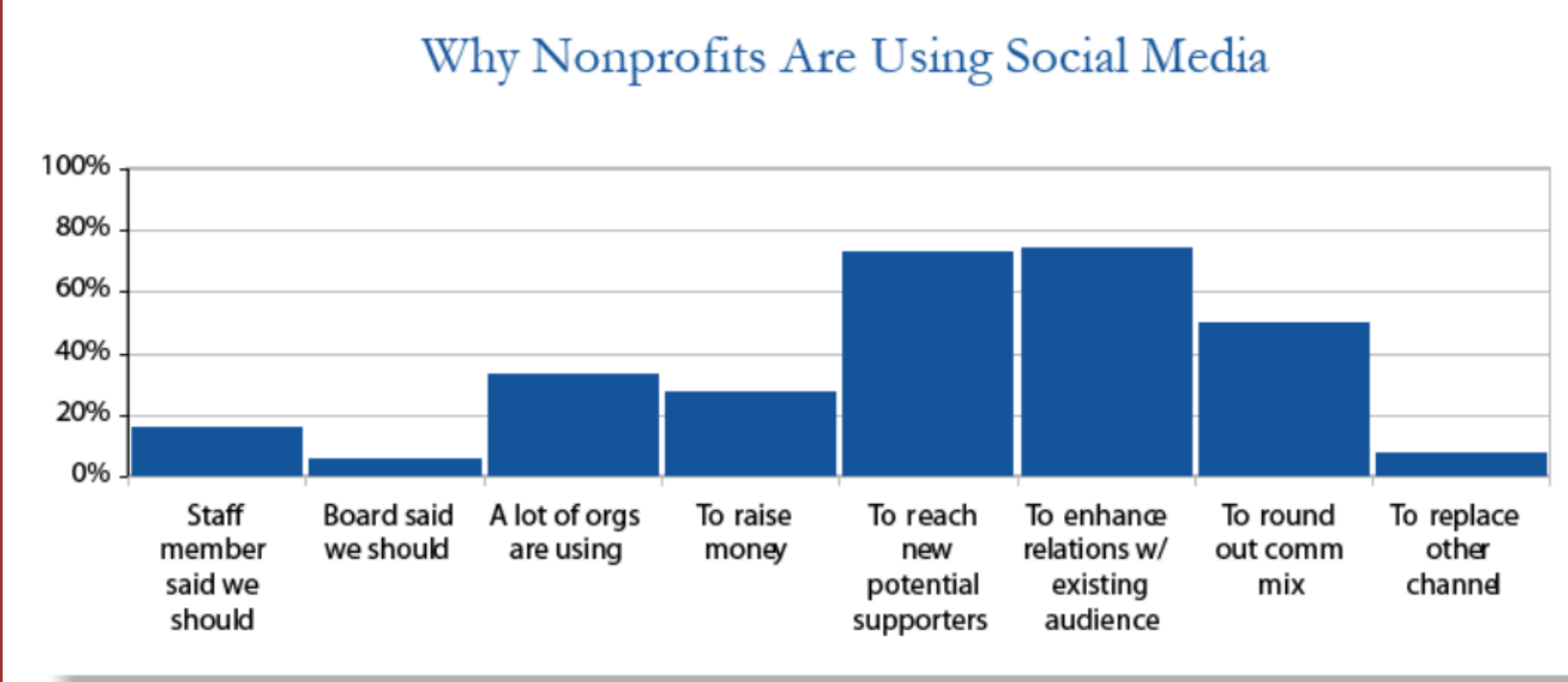


RSWR beneficiary in South India weaves thatch as part of her entrepreneurial venture. Women in Sarwathi's group buy palm leaves from landowners for 5 rupees and after weaving the material together, sell the pieces for 15 rupees.

Results continued

Choose Your Social Media Wisely

Not every social media application will be useful to every organization. Also using too many social media applications will likely be hard to manage for a small organization and will lead to a lack of content publishing or worse, a duplication of static content which will be even less likely to engage potential audiences. For Right Sharing of World Resources, I would recommend they maintain a strong presence on Facebook, but also begin to invest in LinkedIn so that they can reach a different audience of people in their field who they can connect with for guidance and recommendations and help to promote RSWR's visibility.



Conclusions

This same methodology for developing a social media strategy could be used by nearly any small entity that has to be very judicious in how it communicates through 21st century technology.

Moving forward in my research study, I will continue to isolate examples of comparable organizations. I will contact similar organizations and see what their staffing size is like and try to determine how many hours a week can realistically be expected for a successful social media strategy. Once I have completed my research I will present my findings to Right Sharing of World Resources so that it can consult its staff and board to see whether they might be able to support some of these social media strategy suggestions.



70 women farmers in Sierra Leone are benefitting from an RSWR grant to help them expand beyond subsistence farming. Agriculture is the main industry of Sierra Leone, one of the poorest countries in the world. These women are now growing crops of cassava, groundnuts, potatoes, rice, and okra. These women walk several miles to reach the nearest town to sell their goods at market. 800 women are waiting in line for assistance from the partner NGO of this program.

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